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8 DEAD, 31 MISSING IN U'KHAND AVALANCHE; RESCUE OPS ON

Disaster struck Border Roads Organisation's Sumna-Rimkhim road site in Chamoli near India-China border on Friday night

384 RESCUED AFTER GLACIER COLLAPSES

The avalanche occurred after a part of a glacier collapsed, trapping around 430 road construction workers. Search operations were mounted by the Indian Army and ITBP, resulting in the rescue of 384 people. Seven injured persons were flown to the Army hospital in Joshimath in helicopters. Both the Army and the ITBP's forward camps in the area were unaffected | P8

SECOND MAJOR DISASTER SINCE FEBRUARY

- The site is located near the confluence of the Girthigad and the Kiogad, two streams that originate from the Dhauli Ganga river, which witnessed a calamitous avalanche in February, killing 80
- The road is crucial to gain access to locations like the disputed Barahoti area, where Chinese transgressions have been reported

18 inches

ICE LOST PER YEAR IN GLACIERS SINCE 2000 DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

CHENNAI • MADURAI • VIJAYAWADA • BENGALURU • KOCHI • HYDERABAD • VISAKHAPATNAM • COIMBATORE • KOZHIKODE • THIRUVANANTHAPURAM • BELAGAVI • BHUBANESWAR • SHIVAMOGGA • MANGALURU • TIRUPATI • TIRUCHY • TIRUNELVELI • SAMBALPUR • HUBBALLI • DHARMAPURI • KOTTAYAM • KANNUR • VILLUPURAM • KOLLAM • WARANGAL • TADEPALLIGUDEM • NAGAPATTINAM • THRISSUR • KALABURAGI

ANNOUNCEMENT

Dear reader,

India is going through its worst phase of the Covid pandemic. Hundreds of thousands of people are struggling, many in vain, to exercise their right to live, as a ramshackle universal healthcare system proves that it has no answers to the challenges posed by a creepy bug. The health ministry's daily bulletin of fresh positive cases and fatalities has hit the stratosphere, so have SOS messages from individuals and hospitals seeking oxygen refill and lifesaving medicines. Hospitals refuse fresh admissions for want of Covid beds. The rush at crematoriums is heart-breaking. Most of us already have friends or relatives who have succumbed to Covid-19 or are battling for life. In such a tragic time, we find it incongruous that the festival of cricket is on in India, with layers of bio bubbles creating protection. This is commercialism gone crass. The problem is not with the game but its timing. Cricket, too, must accept that we are passing through an unprecedented crisis. In the circumstances, The New Indian Express has decided to suspend IPL coverage in the newspaper with immediate effect till a semblance of normalcy is restored. This is a small gesture towards keeping the nation's attention focused on life and death issues. We are sure that our readers will see the point. These are times when we must stand as one nation with one resolve.

– Editor

Delhi HC asks Centre when 480 MT of oxygen per day allocated for Delhi would see light of the day, raps Delhi govt for being inefficient; says people who could be saved are also dying

HC fumes as govts pass the oxygen buck

KANU SARDA @ New Delhi

THE Delhi High Court on Saturday pulled up both the Centre and the Delhi government for passing the buck in the midst of a pandemic and directed them to ensure smooth supply of oxygen to various hospitals in the national capital.

During an urgent hearing on Saturday, a bench of Justices Vipin Sanghi and Rekha Palli warned it will hang any person who tries to obstruct oxygen supplies to hospitals here.

The court said those who have low immunity may eventually die but the problem comes when people who could be saved are also dying. "We are calling it a wave, it is actually a tsunami," the court said.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, representing the Centre, said there might be a rapid rise in the number of cases in May and June and the country needs to be ready for the worst.

He explained how the government is working round the clock to import oxygen and exploring the remotest possibility of generating oxygen from wherever it is possible.

The court was hearing submissions by the counsel for Maharaja Agrasen Hospital, Jaipur Golden Hospital, Batra Hospital and Saroj Super Speciality Hospital here over shortage of oxygen for treating seriously-ill Covid patients.

"States are arranging from tankers to everything. We are just assisting them. But in Delhi, everything is put on us," the Centre said.

"Let's try and not be a cry baby," Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said in response to Delhi government lawyer's complaint that the Centre was not complying with the guidelines for oxygen allocation.

It also asked the Centre when the 480 MT of oxygen per day allocated for Delhi would see the light of the day.

"You had assured us that 480 MT per day will reach Delhi. Tell us when will it come?" the court questioned the Centre after the Delhi government said it was getting only 380 MT oxygen per day over the past few days and it received only around 300 MT on Friday.

The court also questioned Delhi government officials as to what endeavour they have made to secure tankers to get the supply of oxygen allocated to it by the Centre.

The court observed that while the tankers had reached the plant in Durgapur and were ready to be transported through railway for Rourkela and Kalinga Nagar, the Delhi government did not arrange tanker.

"We know how people react (when they lose their loved ones). Let's not have a law and order situation," the HC said.

The matter would be heard next on April 26. P7

Covid patients getting free oxygen, arranged by a Sikh organisation at Indirapuram Gurdwara, in Ghaziabad on Saturday | PTI

TWEETS CRITICAL OF GOVT TAKEN DOWN

Twitter took down dozens of tweets in India, some of which were critical of the Centre's handling of the pandemic, to comply with an emergency order from the government. The order had directed it to censor over 50 tweets, including some from prominent users

NATIONWIDE

	APRIL 23	APRIL 24
Fresh cases	3,32,730	3,46,786
Recoveries	1,93,279	2,19,838
Deaths	2,263	2,624

Major hospitals hang on to every ounce of O_2

BOSKY KHANNA & PEARL MARIA D'SOUZA @ Bengaluru

WITH Karnataka touching newer highs every day as the Covid-19 situation spins out of control, major hospitals are walking on thin ice as regards their stocks and supply of oxygen cylinders is limited. Many are managing on a day-to-day basis while some are battling with just hours of oxygen stocks left.

On Saturday, the state recorded 29,438 fresh cases, with Bengaluru Urban district alone accounting for 17,342 cases.

The managements of hospitals are keeping their fingers crossed that they do not run out of stock in the dead of the night or when a patient suddenly needs it.

A doctor from Apollo Hospitals said, "It is literally a hand-to-mouth situtation. The demand has shot up five times compared to normal times. We have to keep a 24-hour reserve so that there is no shortage for patients. Earlier, if we needed 500 cubic metres of oxygen per day, the demand has now increased to 1,250 cubic metres. At present, we have 103 cubic metres stock in some of our hospitals." P4

Strong Steps to Stop Spread

With Bengaluru recording 1.5 lakh active cases, the Karnataka Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 has come out with a set of recommendations

- State Government must impose lockdown for 14 days to break the chain of infections
- Should increase beds by taking as much as possible from private medical colleges, nursing homes and hospitals
- Third Wave expected in October-November. Hence, vulnerable age groups must be vaccinated by then

STATEWIDE

	APRIL 23	APRIL 24
Fresh cases	26,962	29,438
Active cases	2,14,311	2,34,483
Deaths	190	208
Recoveries	8,697	9,058
Fresh cases in B'luru Urban	16,662	17,342

'Stricter curbs would have helped'

RAMU PATIL @ Bengaluru

FACED with criticism for not being adequately prepared for the second wave, Health Minister Dr K Sudhakar on Saturday pointed out that the double-mutant strain was responsible for the second wave, as it is more contagious. While agreeing that stricter measures, as suggested by the TAC, could have been taken three weeks ago, he reasoned that the government was faced with the task of saving livelihoods at the same time. FULL INTERVIEW | P4

SOS MESSAGES FLOOD TWITTER

@Tarunvijay

My elder cousin brother, 91, no plasma available, no oxygen cylinder. Hospital docs said- ghar le jaiye. #Faridabad. Where are we heading ? Those without any connection, those who do not know any influential person, those who are just commoners....

@malini_aisola

An Undertaking that loved ones are being asked to sign at @SanjHospital, Delhi hospital that says it is not the responsibility of the hospital if the patient dies due to scarcity of oxygen

@JaiveerShergill

Need hospital bed for a 8month pregnant lady -oxygen level has dipped to 84 and situation not looking good at all. She is right now in Dwarka -Any leads please let me know!!

@AdityaRajKaul #SOS DELHI

Baby needs ventilator in Critical State.
Ad-Nehru vihar Mustafabad Delhi
Age 2.2year
Please help. Delhi!!

@sumeetbhasin

Requirement of Plasma Donor on urgent basis of "A or AB" blood group.
Age -53 Years/ Female
Hospital Shalimar Bagh

thaman S @MusicThaman

FIGHTING FOR LIFE
A VERY GOOD MUSICIAN
O+VE PLASMA
VERY URGENT
LOCATION - DIYA HOSPITAL

Air Force, Navy ferry oxygen tanks, medical staff for Covid fight

BALA CHAUHAN @ Bengaluru

THE Union Government is deploying every available resource to tide over the oxygen emergency in the country. Given the urgency, the Railways, the Indian Air Force (IAF) and the Indian Navy have been pressed into massive Covid-19 relief efforts.

"One C-17 aircraft of the IAF left for Changi International Airport, Singapore, from the Hindon Air Base at 2 am on April 24. It is on its way to offload four empty cryogenic oxygen containers at Panagarh in West Bengal," said IAF spokesperson Wing Commander Ashish Moghe.

"Another C-17 left Hindon Air Base for the Lohegaon Air Base in Pune for loading two empty cryogenic oxygen container trucks which were then flown to Jamnagar Air Base. The same -C17 aircraft is currently on its second shuttle from Pune to Jamnagar, with a load of two more empty containers," he added.

One C-17 aircraft transported two empty containers from Jodhpur to Jamnagar early on Saturday. One IAF Chinook helicopter and one AN-32 transport aircraft took Covid testing equipment from Jammu to Leh and from Jammu to Kargil, respectively. "The equipment consisted of bio -safety cabinets, centrifuges and stabilisers. These machines have been made by the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and now given to the Union Territory of Ladakh to enhance testing," he added.

Meanwhile, taking into account the rise in Covid-19 cases in the Lakshadweep and Minicoy islands, the Southern Naval Command Headquarters at Kochi has deputed its Naval Ship INS Sharda as 'Oxygen Express' to ferry oxygen cylinders to the islands and also to bring back empty cylinders to the mainland for refilling them," said Defence chief spokesperson Commander Mehul Karnik. He added that a medical team comprising of two doctors, two nursing assistants, along with essential medical supplies, have also been provided through naval resources to augment medical support to the islands. P7

An oxygen container truck being loaded on to an IAF C-17 Globemaster heavylift transport aircraft | PTI

Covaxin at ₹600 for govts, ₹1.2k for pvt hosps

NEW DELHI : Hyderabad-based Bharat Biotech on Saturday announced that its Covid-19 vaccine, Covaxin, will cost ₹600 per dose to state governments and ₹1,200 per dose to private hospitals, two days after its competitor Serum Institute of India declared the procurement rate for Covishield through non-Central government channels. The company's vaccine will continue to be delivered to the Centre for ₹150 per dose. "We would like to state that more than 50% of our capacities have been reserved for Central government supplies," it said adding that the vaccine has a distinct feature of having a 28-day open vial policy. This means, once opened, the vaccine can be stored at 2-8 degree Celsius for 28 days.

WITH THIS ISSUE
THE COVID GENERATION
PLUS 12 PAGES MAGAZINE

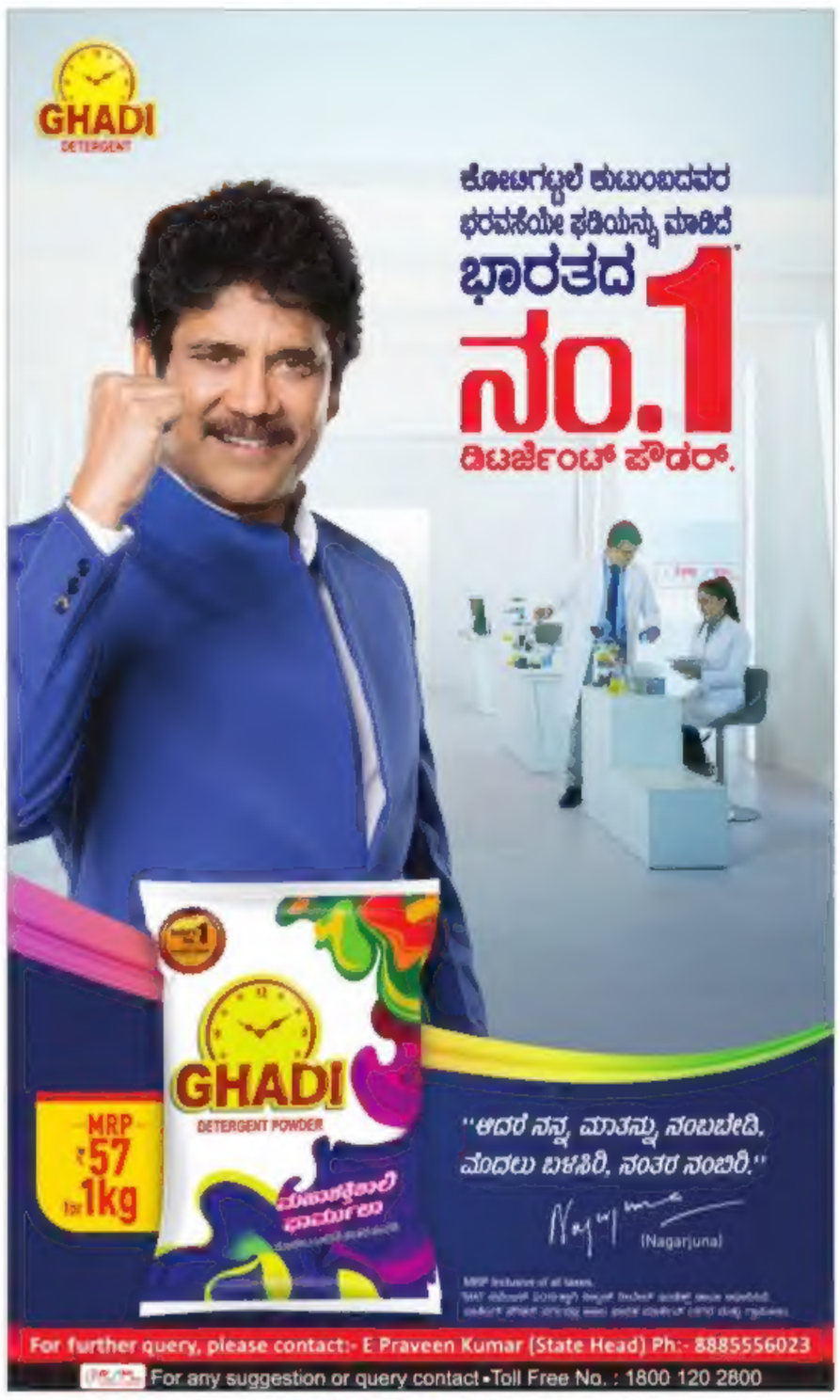
Centre says ₹150/dose, SII says ₹400

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ New Delhi

THE confusion over the cost of Covishield vaccine doses continued on Saturday, with the Union Health Ministry saying it would keep procuring it at ₹150 per dose, while the Serum Institute of India had said on record earlier it would sell the vaccine at ₹400 to the Centre after its initial order is fulfilled.

The ministry's clarification came at a time when Covishield manufacturer SII is facing intense criticism over its differential pricing. As part of its new policy, the Centre had recently created two streams of procurement with 50% going to itself and the rest being shared by states and private hospitals. The SII had announced ₹400 as the cost per dose for states and ₹600 for private hospitals.

With the ministry and Congress leader Jairam Ramesh locked in a sparring match, the latter tweeted: "SII said ₹400 is the new price for ALL new govt procurements — States & Centre. What's the truth?" CONTINUED ON: P7



RAMANA
TAKES CHARGE AS CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA
P8

Sharp vegetable price crash singes farmers' hopes

A woman farmhand gets rid of the tomato crop in a field due to the steep fall in vegetable prices, in Chamarajanagar district on Saturday | UDAYSHANKAR S

K SHIVA KUMAR @ Mysuru

JUST when they were hoping for a bumper yield, after suffering huge losses last year during the first wave of Covid-19, farmers are finding themselves in dire straits again. The government has imposed strict curbs to control the spread of the highly infectious SARS-CoV2 virus.

The cap on number of attendees at weddings, ban on social gatherings, fairs and festivals have also badly affected the prospects of farmers.

Adding to their worries, there has been a noticeable dip in the movement of vehicles transporting vegetables and fruits to neighbouring Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Vegetables, that were being sold for a minimum of ₹20 per kg have now dropped sharply to under ₹10 per kg.

Farmers, who had invested heavily on crops like tomato, watermelon, beans, cabbage, ladies finger, cucumber, banana, etc., anticipating good returns, are shattered as they are forced to sell at throwaway prices. CONTINUED ON: P5